

Issue 23

\$2

# INFILTRATION

the zine about going places you're not supposed to go

Toronto General Hospital

# Dying Young

by Ninj

THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA was completed around 2680 BC and is still going strong almost five millennia later. The Pantheon was erected in 27 BC and is still keepin' it real more than 20 centuries later. Notre Dame Cathedral was completed in 1330 AD and has been doing its thing without interruption for the past 674 years.

Back in the day when these sturdy symphonies in stone were built, their intended lifespans were measured not in terms of business cycles but in terms of ages. This was back when people really took pride in their work, or at least the work of their slaves, and designed and built not just to fulfill a temporary business need but to forge lasting tributes to the things that mattered to them, and in the process created symbols that would survive the centuries.

It's odd that modern civilization is nowhere near as good at building things as our ancient and medieval forebears. Today, most new buildings are designed to have functional lifespans of a mere 25 to 100 years.


The average age of buildings in many cities is plummeting as the old stone stalwarts are torn down or suffer insulting façadectomies, and are replaced with temporary, hastily tossed together squats fashioned of plywood, glass and drywall, rarely designed to outlive their owners.

In many cities, average architectural lifespans are rapidly descending to the level of human lifespans in Somalia or the Congo. As in those sad, Sisyphean societies, when there are no wise elders to provide

stability, guidance and a sense of connection to the past, the notion of progress disappears and little lasts or improves from one generation to the next.

We must stop designing flimsy, temporary structures that are engineered for obsolescence. We must return to the practice of making buildings that will outlast us by centuries and get firmly woven into the DNA of our urban environments. Businesses and governments need to think beyond the immediate, selfish desires of their shareholders and constituents. Corporate entities and their architects are great at thinking big, but they also need to think long.

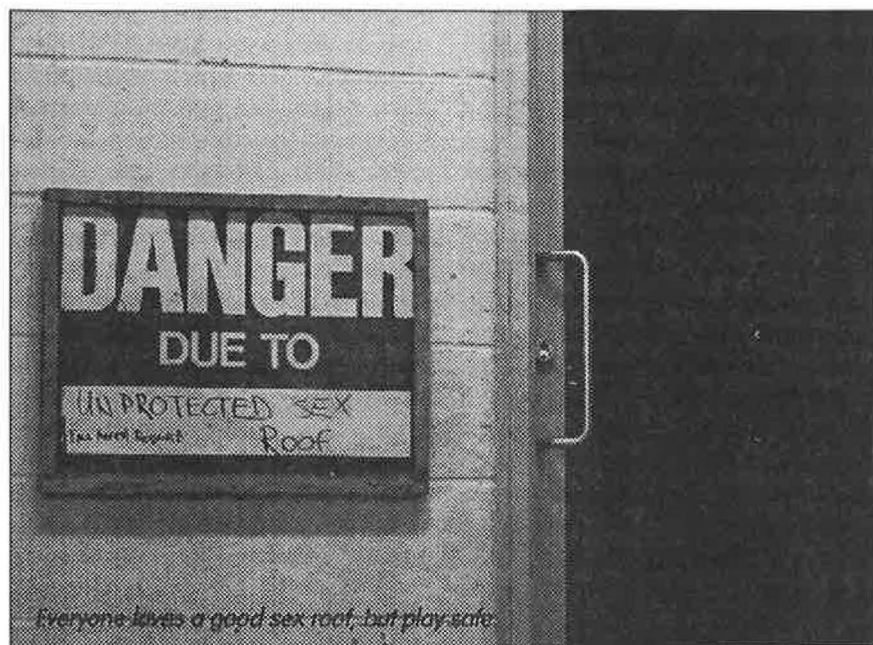
Economically and technologically, if not socially, we are advanced enough to build structures that will outlast the pyramids. We should not be repeatedly wasting money, energy and materials building office towers designed to fall apart after 30 years. If every generation left behind useful, sturdy structures for the generations to come, there'd probably be no housing shortage today, and many people would probably feel a greater connection to their environment.

Watching a beloved building being prematurely smashed into rubble is painful, nasty and bad, and we endured it again and again while making this issue. None of the magnificent buildings demolished or gutted while we were making this issue had a chance to celebrate their 100th birthday. Anything we missed or failed to take decent pictures of is gone, though definitely not forgotten. 

# INFILTRATION

the zine about going places you're not supposed to go

Editorial .....	2
Letter .....	4
Toronto General Hospital .....	5



for Charlie

"Life is full of misery, loneliness, and suffering —  
and it's all over much too soon." —Woody Allen

Infiltration is published occasionally. Please send submissions and feedback to: Infiltration, PO Box 13, Station E, Toronto, ON, M6H 4E1. Website: [www.infiltration.org](http://www.infiltration.org). E-mail: [ninj@infiltration.org](mailto:ninj@infiltration.org), [liz@infiltration.org](mailto:liz@infiltration.org). You can subscribe to this zine for the next four issues by sending us \$10 cash if you want. Cover: Liz's photo inside the Tower of Destiny atop the Charlie Conacher Research Wing. Thanks to Ogreboy, Offset, Gilligan, Harpocrates, Sean, Dasparil, Victor and Avatar-X for exploring with us.

## Wonder Hospital

WHILE SEARCHING for something else, two good friends of mine and I stumbled upon an abandoned wing at Toronto General Hospital. This magnificent structure, hollowed out by progress, a behemoth in our presence, cried to us. Upon entry, we headed straight downstairs to a small area where elevator banks once stood. Through a door marked "danger", we found one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen — a catacomb-esque ruin of what used to be a research wing of the hospital. Above this, for four more floors, similar wreckage also lies, with scenery all covered in a thick dust that has a beautiful aura about it — is this the sand of time?

Over the next few visits, I familiarized myself with the building, and was able to gain access to not only the roof, but to the much sought-after tower that lies atop this magnificent structure. Searching online, I found a website — Viewing Hole Gallery ([\[tyempire.org/view/\]\(http://tyempire.org/view/\)\) — with pictures from inside this very wing after it was abandoned, but before it was cleared out. I'm fairly familiar with the ability of some of these sites and stories to move the reader, but I almost started to cry at these sights. I was there — but not \*there\*. How could a building deteriorate so much so quickly? This hospital wing is now a barren wasteland, yet still remains both beautiful and haunting.](http://www.kit-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

I have been caught a few times in this building, but I will not bore you with the details here, for here I only wish to relay the... absolute splendor of the place. This is not simply an aesthetic beauty, but something you feel throughout your entire body, something which penetrates deep within your soul. Who were the people who worked here? What did they do? Why are they no longer here?

To me, this building typified what it means to be an 'urban explorer' — which always starts in wonder. Jono

## Buying Back Issues, Subscribing or Whatever

So, you want to buy some issues of *Infiltration*, huh? Well, it's just as well you're reading this ad. We keep all our past issues in print and offer attractive packages on shiny new future issues as well! Isn't this your lucky day.



Single Back Issues.....\$3 postpaid in North America/  
\$4 overseas



Set of Back Issues (1-22).....\$45 postpaid in North America/  
\$50 overseas



4 Issue Subscription.....\$10 postpaid in North America/  
(about 2 years) \$13 overseas

Please note we accept either US or Canadian currency, **cash only**. No cheques or money orders. Well-concealed cash should make it through the mail just fine. Please e-mail [liz@infiltration.org](mailto:liz@infiltration.org) with any further questions.

**Infiltration, PO Box 13, Station E, Toronto, ON, M6H 4E1, Canada**



# Toronto General Hospital

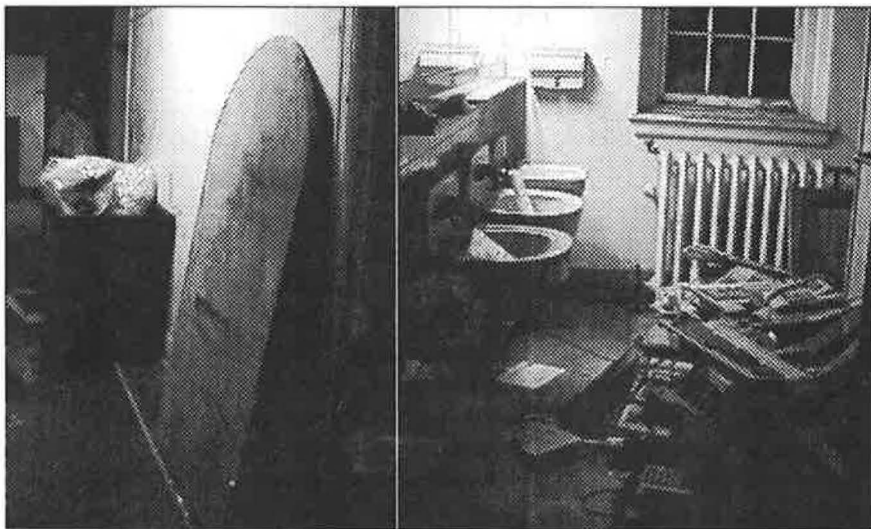
by Ninj

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH Toronto General Hospital began a few years ago when I was sick enough to earn myself a stay for a few days. My room's window overlooked the darkened, empty hallways of the Thomas J. Bell Wing, one of the oldest of the hospital's dozen or so different wings. Originally constructed in 1928 as the opulent "Private Patients Pavilion", the Bell Wing had been built as a sort of health hotel where rich patients could buy themselves a bed if the rest of the hospital was full. The fancypants wing featured Persian rugs, wood panelled walls and operating rooms decorated with a mother-of-pearl finish.

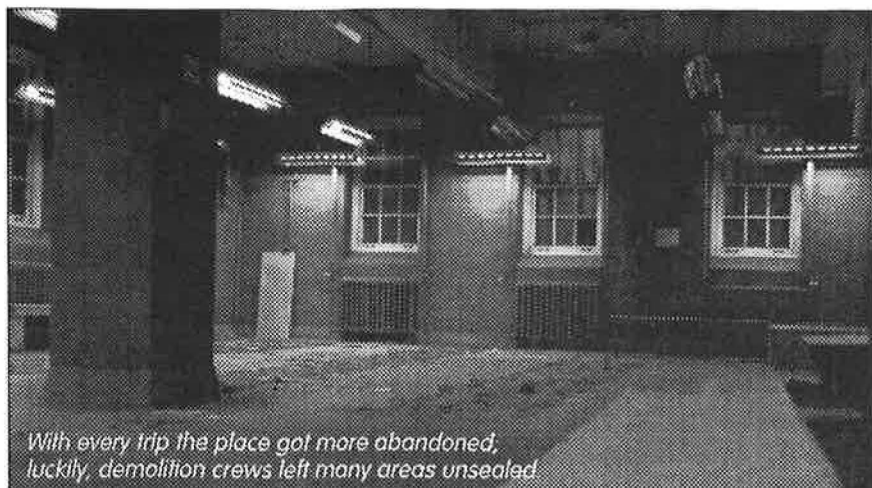
Tall, wooden hoarding went up around the abandoned wing during my stay and, shortly after my release in spring 2002, the once-opulent building was repeatedly smashed

until it toppled to the ground. At the same time, just a falling brick's distance away, the hospital placed the finishing touches on a shiny new 175,000-square-foot, \$55-million wing called the R. Fraser Elliot Support Services Building.

Not long afterwards, I returned to the hospital for a fairly major operation that probably saved my life. After several long days of healin', feelin' and starin' at the ceilin', Liz suggested that she and I go for a walk around the hospital. I eagerly hopped out of bed and grabbed my IV pole. Liz and I took a service elevator down to the hospital's nether regions, where we tried to evade employees and security cameras as we explored the hospital's extensive basements and tunnels until I became physically and nervously exhausted. It was heaven, especially



*On one of our earliest explorations (with me still wearing my hospital gown), Liz and I discovered an abandoned floor notable for its giant stone tombstones and piles of disused computer equipment in its washrooms. (Courtesy of Liz)*



*With every trip the place got more abandoned, luckily, demolition crews left many areas unsealed*

since I hadn't been well enough to go exploring for months. When I came off the IV a few days later, Liz and I eagerly resumed our quest, and were especially delighted when we happened upon an empty floor in an old and underused wing that introduced itself to us as Charlie.

### **Charlie**

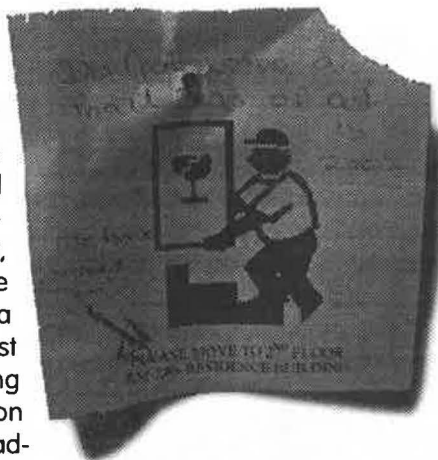
After I checked out, Liz and I continued to be interested in the hospital, particularly in the mysterious semi-abandoned wing we'd discovered during my stay. The 1913 Charlie Conacher Research Wing — CCRW in hospital parlance, but always Charlie to Liz and I — was the kernel of the now-mammoth Toronto General Hospital. Together with the College Wing, the immediate neighbour with which it was often grouped, Charlie constituted by far the most elegant and beautiful section of the hospital, with solid-looking stone walls, decorative arches and a beautiful two-storey tower on its roof that Liz dubbed the Tower of Destiny. From the outside, the north face of the hospital looked like a palace.

Inside, neglect was a little more obvious. Much of the building was empty and no longer visited by janitors or other maintenance workers. Signs, lights and electronic gadgets had not been replaced in many years. One of the elevators was permanently broken and the other felt precarious. Some stairwells were strewn with garbage and smelled strongly of urine. Much of the fourth floor was devoted to storing garbage or old computer equipment in large piles on bathroom floors, in bathtubs and in shower stalls. Unfortunately, about the only thing the hospital didn't neglect was the job of locking up the exits to the rooftop tower.

Liz and I returned to visit our sick friend in the hospital every now and then and in time we found our way out onto part of the roof. Although the roof's gravel surface made it clear that the area had never been intended for public use, someone had put a lot of care into its construction. Decorative carvings and scrollwork were set into the stone, and handsome brick arches were strung

together to form structures that reminded us of aqueducts. The view of the hospital and the surrounding area was great, aside from one black spot in a fenced-in area east of the building where destruction equipment was gradually accumulating.

Descending back to the empty fourth floor, Liz and I were flipping through an old phone book in one of the recently vacated offices when suddenly we heard the sound of someone coming down the darkened hallway towards us. We froze in the middle of the office, both of us still holding the open phone book in our hands. In the slow, whispered conversation that followed, Liz and I decided that running for it was a bad idea, since the presumed guard was somewhere between us and the only exit, and that hiding would only make us look more guilty, so we would instead just stand still and quiet, holding open the phone



book, until eventually the guard came into the room and caught us. Then we'd tell the guard we'd just been looking for a phone number.

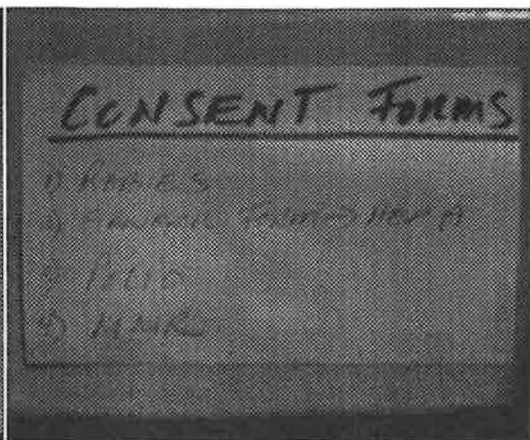
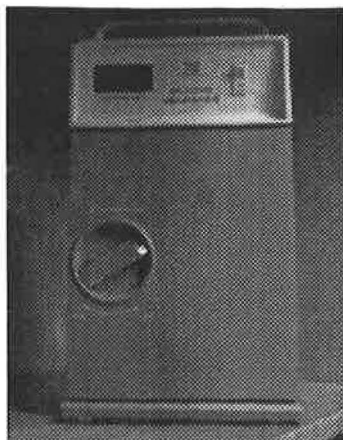
It was a brilliant plan — genius, really —

but we never got to put it to the test, because even after another 10 minutes or so no one had come into the room and we lost our nerve. We calmly strolled out of the room and toward the exit, and in the process passed not a guard but a tiny, startled hospital employee gathering some things from her old office. We smiled at her reassuringly as we summoned the elevator and got out of there.

On every return trip we made, our pal Charlie seemed a little more abandoned and dishevelled. Notices went up that the wing was coming down, to be replaced by new offices for a sinister-sounding, for-profit biotech enterprise calling itself Medical and Related



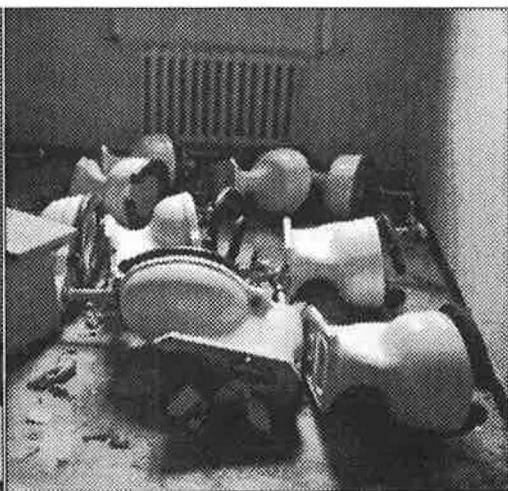
*Charlie's surprisingly welcoming roof, featuring aqueducts and other decorations.*



*Some pleasantly creepy leftovers. Who consents to rabies?*

Services (MaRS). Repairs and cleaning stopped. The wing's few remaining occupants began evacuating their offices with a newfound urgency, taking only what they felt like hanging on to, often simply leaving their old records, mementoes and shoes strewn about on the floor. As the staff moved out a few houseless people moved in, finding good uses for the food, linen and lubricating lotion the hospital crews left behind. All too soon, the main entrances to Charlie

were locked, and "Do Not Enter" and "Danger Due to: Demolition" signs were plastered everywhere. Locks were chiselled off all the lockers and their ancient contents spilled out into the hallways. Soon even pieces of permanent equipment, like hyperbaric chambers and x-ray machines, were being removed. Everything perceived to be of any value was sealed in large sheets of plastic wrap and wheeled away. Then, finally, the lights went out.



*A leftover lung tester and some surplus toilets. (Courtesy of Liz)*

## Sinking to New Depths

While Liz and I were sad about the impending destruction of our beloved wing, we were also determined to get to know it as thoroughly as possible before it was too late. Slipping behind the demolition crew's barriers early one weeknight, Liz and I toured the wing's recently evacuated offices, clinics and locker rooms, occasionally hiding to avoid the vulture-like movers looting all around us.

While this was good tense fun for a while, it was when we came to the bottom of a service stairwell that things started to get interesting. As we came down, I looked ahead and, seeing no further stairs, said to Liz, "Awww, it doesn't go down any further."

"Oh, it doesn't?" she said, brushing past me and moving to lift up an old iron trapdoor set into the floor.

We peered down into a large, gorgeous, dimly-lit mechanical room in a subbasement about 18 feet beneath us, clicking and hissing tantalizingly. "We have to get there," I said, and we set about doing so.

Proceeding to the door at the far end of the basement we'd heard might be a possible route down, Liz prepared to push it open. Just before she did so, however, she peeked through the hole where the doorknob had once been and then turned to me with wide eyes and whispered "Oh my god!"

"What?" I asked, as she began to briskly walk away from the door.

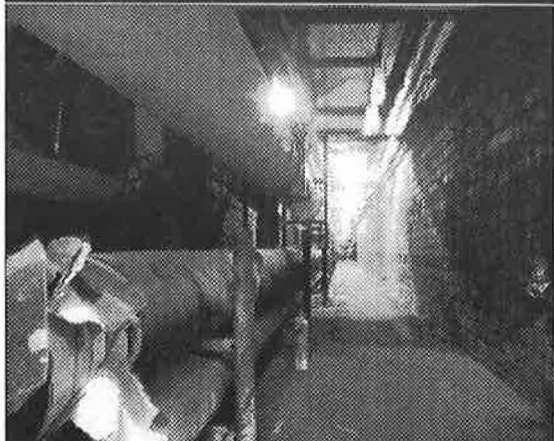
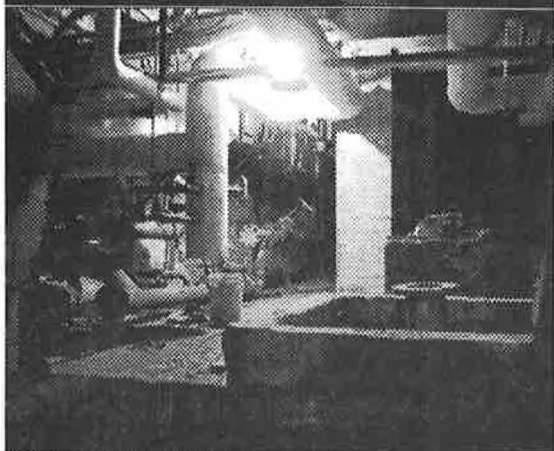
"There was a dude crouched down right on the other side of that door!"

That route blocked, we sought out a second possible entry point, and here met with our first really unbelievable success. Heading down an old stone staircase, we found ourselves in the middle of long, hot, pipe-crammed steam tunnels, bending around corners and extending further than we could see in either direction. The tunnels were filled with a greater number of pipes than I've ever seen in a tunnel before; at points, there were so many pipes that they formed a barricade against further progress.



*Liz pulled open a trapdoor to give us our first glimpse of the steam tunnels.*





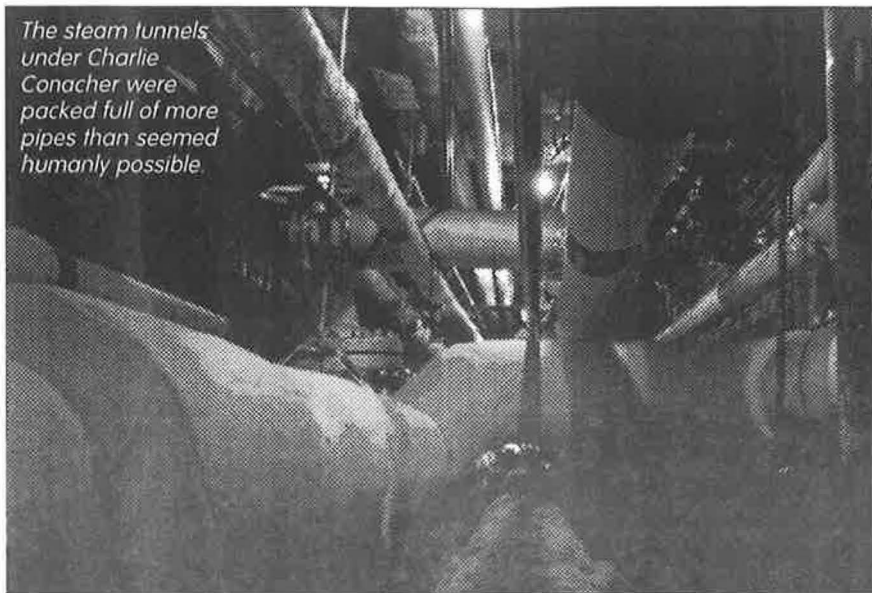
*Inside a completely ordinary looking office, a ladder hidden behind a closet door down to a whole new world. (Courtesy of Liz)*

After a while in this area, we really wanted to see what was in that room with the crouching guy, so we headed back. The guy was gone, and had turned off the lights behind him. We began to prowl around the room for anything interesting, but it looked like just one of the many hundreds of empty offices in the area. It was in a room to the side that we saw the sight that totally filled us with joy and wonder, however: a half-height door tucked away into the corner, concealing not a closet but a metal ladder leading down a chimney-like brick shaft.

The ladder led down to a dark cement tunnel sloping down towards a small wooden doorway. Through the doorway was a spectacular old engine room filled with valves, pipes and ancient machinery, and we recognized it as the mechanical room we'd seen from above earlier. This room was also connected to the steam tunnel system, which we again explored until we came to an area all but completely blocked off with pipes, at which point we turned back.

Liz wasn't into helping me navigate a route through the pipe-clogged

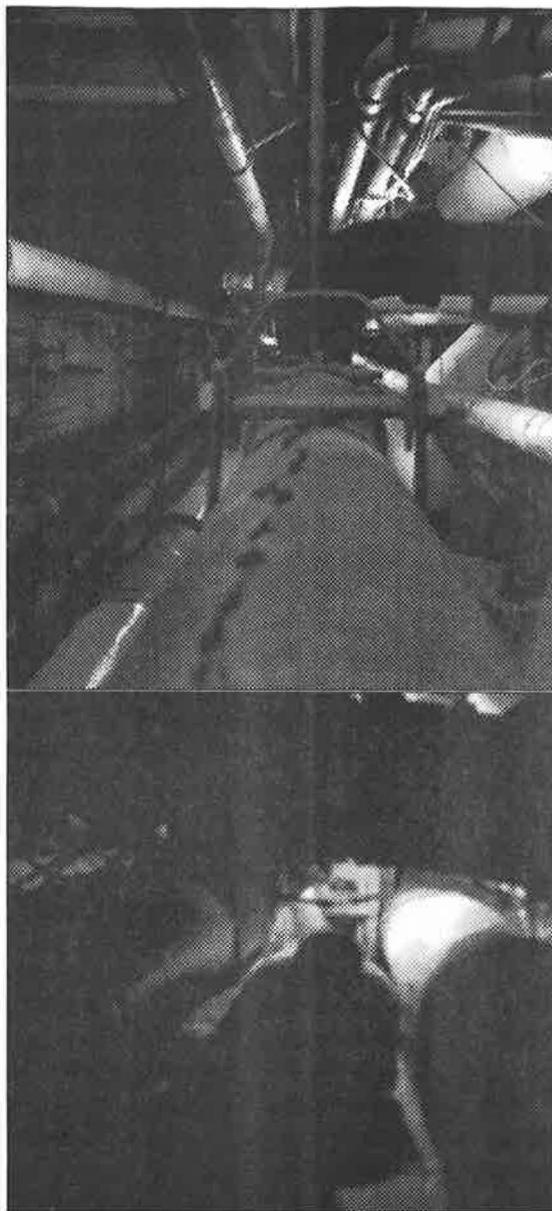
*The steam tunnels  
under Charlie  
Conacher were  
packed full of more  
pipes than seemed  
humanly possible.*



tunnels, so I recruited Harpocrates to join me on my next visit. Though first a security guard and then a shiny new wall threatened to impede our progress, we valiantly pushed onward and downward until we found ourselves back at the easternmost end of the tunnel system. We hopped up into

the tunnels, and crouched, crawled and climbed our way west as best we could. Every now and then we'd come to a huge chaos of pipes that looked like an insurmountable barrier but, through trial and error, we determined which sequences of squeezing under and climbing over were best suited to





off-shoot tunnels where we could temporarily make base camp and take a much-needed crouching break. We managed to make our way into the basement of the otherwise very secure Max Bell wing (in which animal testing is conducted), before coming to a new exit from and potential entrance to the tunnels. Here we decided to prop the door open, leave the tunnels and call it a night, in part because I'd accidentally burned my hand on a pipe. Some ninja, I know.

But some of those pipes had labels that indicated they were going to the University of Toronto, and if those tunnels were going to go to the university, they could be damned sure I was coming with them. Harpocrates was too traumatized by our first trip to come along on a return voyage, so I recruited Sean for the follow-up.

Though Sean and I had to get around a few new barricades, we had no real trouble getting back to the propped-open basement door. We crawled under the huge pipes blocking our

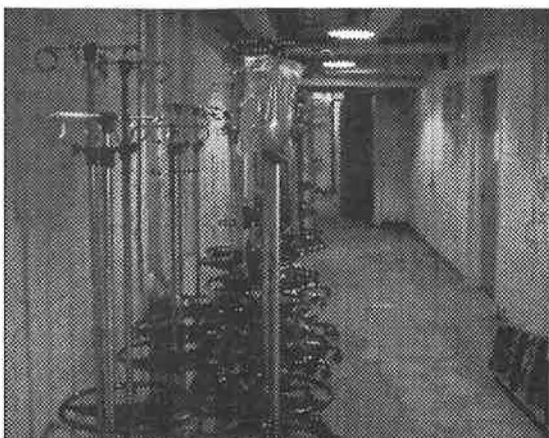
*In places where the pipes didn't seem sturdy enough for us to climb over, we wiggled under instead.*

each individual problem. It was like mountain climbing, but horizontal. It was very slow going, and very hot. We found several mechanical rooms and

progress and headed west. Tempted by an unlit but slightly less crowded tunnel branching off from the one we were in, we headed south for a

while, eventually finding some empty rooms and some tunnels in which we could actually stand up. Here we also found a door leading out to the largely abandoned basement of the Mulock-Larkin wing, where we investigated old, mostly empty workshops for a while, until we heard some voices and retreated to the tunnels. After touring the entirety of the southern tunnel system and its associated mechanical rooms, we headed back to the main tunnel and pressed on to the west.

Even as we heard the subway rumbling by just a short distance ahead of us, however, the dread light at the end of the tunnel appeared, all too soon, indicating that these tunnels weren't going to take us as far as the university. Before long, we spilled out into a partially flooded mechanical room, and from here climbed up two levels (through two very loud metal trapdoors) to return to ground level. There was more to see, but the trapdoors had made so much noise that Sean thought we'd be better off if we called it a night, so we headed out into the rainy evening.



*The many wonders accessible through the tunnels included creepy basements, a commentary on modern consumerism and a "computer lab" with its only exits through the roof and ceiling.*

## Danger Due to Demolition

Shortly after this, the hospital became serious about restricting access to Charlie. More and more "Danger Due To: Demolition" signs were taped up, doors were permanently nailed shut and thick cinder block walls were erected to block all access to the wing. The demolition crews began knocking down the eastern half of the wing, obliterating the old locker rooms and tunnel entrances and carting away all the beautiful old bricks in dumpsters.

One cold winter day when I couldn't recruit anyone to come along, I headed in to see how ol' Charlie was doing. Walking through the tunnels to the point where the in-use part of the hospital met the ill-fated wing, I stared sadly at the locked door set into the cinder-block walls that had been erected to keep me out. I ventured up the stairs one floor at a time and tried two more doors, finding them both locked.

To my surprise, however, the knob to the door on the third floor turned in my hand. Peeking through a crack in the door, I could see perhaps two dozen workers busily



working away amid the huge clouds of dust. Obviously I wouldn't be able to explore this level while they were actively working on it, but there was no one between me

and the staircase leading to the other levels of the empty wing. I closed the door behind me and very quietly crept over to the door and skipped down the stairs, pausing only to rub some dry-wall dust into my coat and hair so I'd be more likely to pass for a construction worker if I ran into anyone.

The second floor was much more like it — dust and noise filtered down through cracks in the roof, but I had the whole floor to myself. As long as I stayed clear of the windows, no one would see me. I wandered the stripped-down halls and the badly beaten rooms freely, taking lots of sad

but beautiful pictures. At one point I noticed a thick cable running beneath a locked steel door. A locked door in a wing already closed and locked? How very secure! Obviously, I thought, there must be something cool in there. The lock was on my side of the door, so I unlocked it and headed through, easing the door shut behind me.



*Stripping the building of the drywall did wonders for its complexion.*



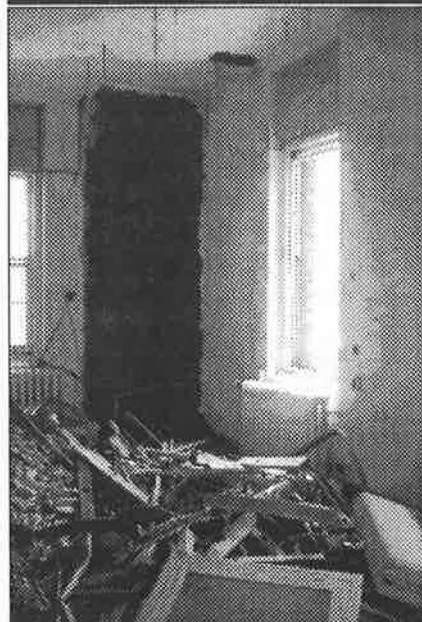
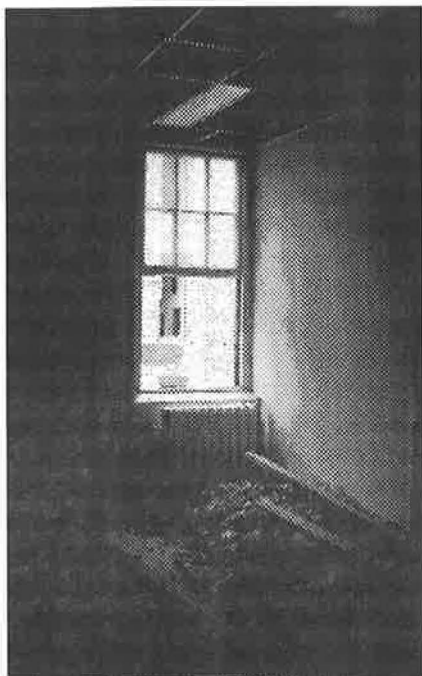
"Click-k," said the door.

"Oh fuuuuccck," said the ninja.

That extra k had been the sound of a few pins too many tumbling into place; trying the door, I found that it had indeed locked behind me. Locked tight. Alright, I told myself. No need to panic yet. I was in a short hallway with eight or nine rooms branching off of it. It was quite possible that one of these rooms would be connected to a fire escape or some other exit. Forcing myself to calm down, I tried to remain casual as I browsed the various rooms, even stopping to take a few pictures of the large holes in the walls and the tall stacks of debris. But, after examining all the rooms thoroughly, twice, and then after examining the whole wing thoroughly one last time, twice, I still had not managed to find any possible exit. I tried the door again. No, it was still locked. I ran up to the door from a distance and kicked at the area beside the lock. No, the steel door did not come out of the steel frame. I yelled out "HELLO!" No answer.

I'd been locked in for almost an hour now, and I realized that I really was trapped, thoroughly trapped, in a locked, neglected section of a locked, neglected floor of a locked, neglected wing. It seemed clear that I would remain trapped here until I starved to death, my brittle skeleton eventually falling to the wrecking ball at the same time as the rest of the wing. Liz was obviously going to be very mad at me.

I didn't actually think I would die there, as I could see some workers on the floor above me through the windows, and I was sure I could get their attention if I needed to... but doing so would certainly earn me a trip to the



*Locked in a room inside the abandoned wing undergoing demolition, I consoled myself with the thought that at least I was going to die in a cool building.*

## World Youth Day

In July 2002, Toronto General decided to close — yes, *CLOSE* — as a security precaution while the Catholic Church's World Youth Day parade passed in front of it. No one was to be permitted on the site without a pass. This level of precaution struck me as not only unreasonable but very difficult to enforce, so I decided to go visit the hospital anyhow and see how tough it would be.

The main west entrance to the hospital was closed entirely. Heading to the main east entrance, I joined a single-file line of people being admitted through a single narrow doorway. Two guards wearing "security" vests were controlling the flow of the line. When I got to the front, one ordered "I need to see your hospital staff pass or official visitor pass." I then began to relate a long, wearying story about how I had to have a test done, and no one had warned me that the hospital would be closed, and I had come such a long way and the subway was so crowded with Catholics, and

so on. The line behind me began to build, and it had begun to pour, so the guard just sort of nodded me through wordlessly.

I proceeded to the clinic I'd mentioned to the guard, only to find it was closed. Most things were closed — I'd never seen TGH so empty. Suspecting that another guard would be in front of the passenger elevators, I took the nearest service elevator to a floor I knew to be insecure. As I strolled past the floor's reception desk, I smiled and waved at a wall behind the people manning the desk, so they'd each assume I had someone else's okay and ignore me. They did. I continued down the hall towards the stairs, which I scaled to the top of the building.

To my joyous surprise, the door at the top of the building was open, so I strolled out into the pouring rain, 17 storeys above the road where the Catholic procession would soon be taking place. Squeezing myself through the one missing panel in the aluminum fence that separates one side of the



*On the day when hospital security was supposed to be at its tightest, the hosp*

roof from the other, I was able to get nice pictures of the road below and the construction of the new wing of the hospital.

It was pouring heavily this entire time, so by the time I stepped back inside I was dripping wet. Realizing that I'd seem suspicious if any employee saw me in this state, I decided to stick to the stairwell, which no one but me ever uses, since the doors to the stairwell are alarmed on most floors. As I got down to about the 10th floor, however, I heard jingly footsteps coming down about three storeys above me. Had I been seen? My soaking shoes were squeaking fiercely, so I tried to walk down the stairs both as quickly and as quietly as possible, hoping that the jingly fellow behind me wouldn't notice that I was in the stairwell below him. But the guy was coming strong, taking stairs much faster than most people would and quickly closing the gap between the two of us to between one and two storeys — it felt, to me, like he was chasing me. I soon gave up on the idea of stealth and just

went for speed, racing down the stairs as fast as I possibly could, holding onto the handrail so I could safely jump down the final few steps on each flight.

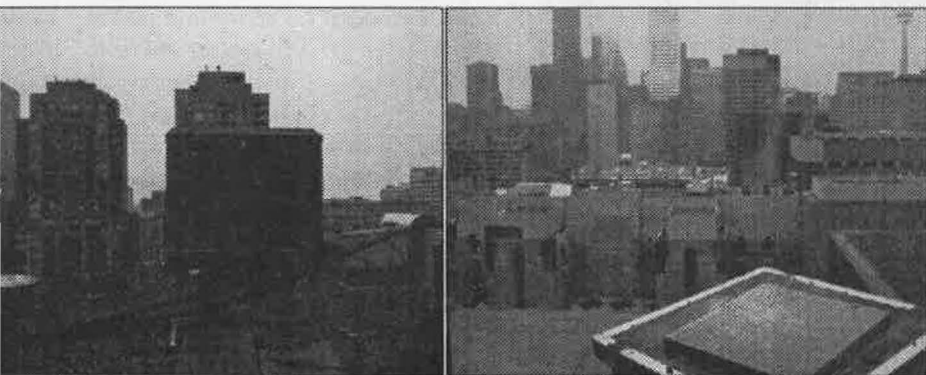
Luckily, I was faster than my pursuer, and was a full three storeys ahead of him by the time I returned to the second level and hopped back out into the briarpatch of doors and passageways that I probably knew better than any staff member. Not wanting to risk going out the way I came in, I headed for a side exit I knew of. When I got there, I was surprised to see that it was manned by two guards who immediately looked up at me, clearly surprised to see me.

It was time to come up with something brilliant, some completely suave justification for the fact that I was emerging, pass-less, drenched and out-of-breath, from an out-of-use wing of the hospital on this day when the hospital was closed to the public.

"Hi," I said, smiling.

"Hi," they said, smiling.

I passed through the door and went home.

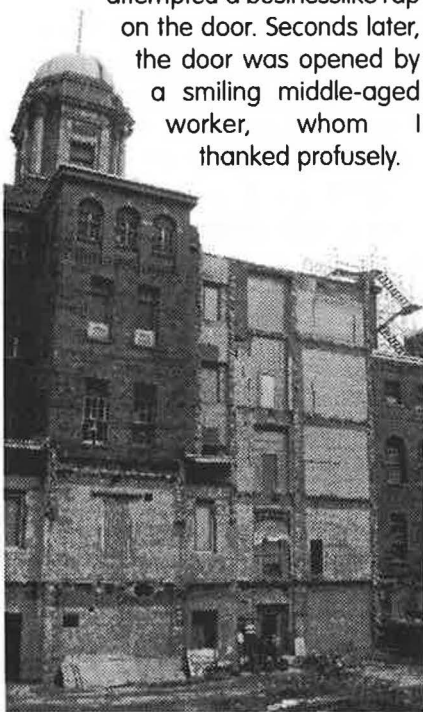


*al's tallest and perhaps most sniper-friendly roof was completely accessible.*

security office at the very least.

Realizing I had no other options, I began to prepare to surrender. I went through my digital camera and deleted all my incriminating pictures of doors, alarms, signs, workers, etc., leaving only my more conventionally appealing shots of abandoned rooms. I took some proofs of *Infiltration 20* out of my bag and stuffed them into a nearby garbage pile. I sighed and began to think of how I'd phrase my call for help.

Just then, however, I thought I heard a whistling noise somewhere on the other side of the door. I pressed my ear up against the door and listened, my heart warming and filling with joy as I heard the sweet, sweet notes growing closer. A call for help would not be necessary; instead, I attempted a businesslike rap on the door. Seconds later, the door was opened by a smiling middle-aged worker, whom I thanked profusely.



"Wow," he said. "You've had a hell of a lot of luck. *Nobody* comes through here." He laughed and kept heading down the hallway, apparently not interested in any explanations or excuses I might provide — not that I could have lied to someone to whom I was so deeply grateful. Being not at all eager to push my luck, I left the hospital by the nearest exit.

### Quest for the Summit

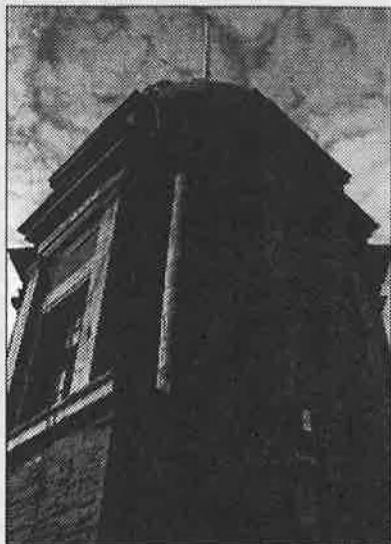
Although the trauma of getting locked in made me wary for a little while, I was still eager to somehow get into that tower as long as I could get someone else to come along. The Cave Clan's Gilligan was in town at the time and up for anything, so the two of us made a plan to infiltrate the site late at night, after most of the workers went home.

We arrived at about midnight and began circling the perimeter in search of weaknesses. We saw that the destruction was far along. Several wards, including the one in which I'd been trapped, had been demolished, and the entire eastern third of the building lay in ruins. What remained of the wing was blocked by well-lit, eight-foot-tall wooden hoarding around the site, all of which was clearly visible to the trickle of employees occasionally milling about. Coming around the back of the site, however, we noticed that a squat, poorly lit, triangle-roofed construction office spanned both sides of the hoarding. Gilligan proposed using the building's roof as a bridge into the site.

*The ward I'd been trapped in was one of several demolished a few days after my visit.*

# The Tower of Destiny

by Liz



ONE SPECIAL PART of Toronto General Hospital has always stood out as a reminder of a time when hospitals were genteel — beautiful, even. I speak, of course, of the cupola that tops the entrance to the College street building.

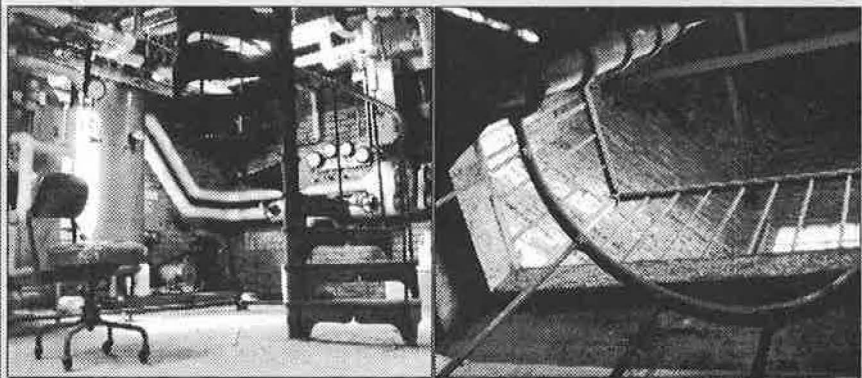
This part of the College street structure, better known as the Charlie Conacher Research Wing (named for the former Toronto Maple Leaf!), is the most intriguing part of the hospital to explore. The cherry on top is its crowning tower.

At first sight, I knew had to make it into that tower. Its situation on top of the hospital's most neglected wing had me convinced it would be, at the very least, *underutilized*. What was inside? Was it an observatory? Who was it for? And more importantly, how the hell did one get in?

Repeated trips to the top of Charlie Conacher proved confusing. At one point I found a wooden bridge between one rooftop segment and another, and thought that might be the key. It wasn't. Numerous locked doors on the fourth floor of CCRW seemed tempting as well — were the stairs behind them? (They weren't.)

My tempting tower wasn't built for easy access, as it turns out. To reach the cupola you must first ascend to the roof (not a big problem if the door is unlocked at the top) and then cross the roof to the tower's base. There, you will find another locked door. Assuming you have somehow made it past both of these steel barriers, you will find yourself inside a gorgeous, dirty, neglected two-storey tower.

On the first level you'll find a lonely office chair, presumably for the guy who comes up here to smoke and occasionally turn the valves on the labyrinth of dusty air compressors. In the centre of the room is a spiral staircase. The stairs go up to an observatory room; tall windows — which in a previous life could be opened to miniature balconies — bathe the aged room in a heavenly light. It's dirty here, too, and the only fixture or furnishing is another chair. But you can pause and take in the panoramic views from what used to be the top of the biggest hospital in the British empire, and lose yourself in the whirring of machinery, and history.







*Making our way into the pits where the rear wards had once stood, Gill and I hoisted ourselves up and in. The main halls and construction office were accessible, but tunnel access had gotten trickier.*

"I think we should be very careful and stay really low or else people on the street could see us," I replied. "This might not be the best way."

"But it'll be the most fun way," Gilligan said with a mischievous smile. There was no arguing with that, so we hoisted ourselves on top of a nearby handrail and climbed up onto the shingled roof. We kept low as we crawled the length of the roof, leaping down into the pit of mud when we reached the far side of the hoarding. Racing across the well-lit yard into some shadows, we scaled the outside of the building up to a poorly barricaded entrance on the first floor and found ourselves inside the main hallway of the heavily gutted building.

Cruel as the demolition seemed to me, I had to admit the building looked damned good stripped of all its styro-foam ceiling tiles, linoleum flooring, and sheetrock walls. The exposed brick corridors were still lit with construction lamps, so Gilligan and I tried to stay low as we gradually made our way through the building, peeking in on the steam tunnels, the construction office, and the second-floor balconies as we made our way up towards the top of the building.

At the fourth floor, we beheld an amazing site: the constantly locked door blocking the route to the Tower of Destiny had been removed, and metal scaffolding led two storeys up to the main roof. Gilligan was iffy about climbing the well-lit and fully exposed scaffolding, pointing out that anyone on the busy street below could look up and see us at any time, but I suggested that we

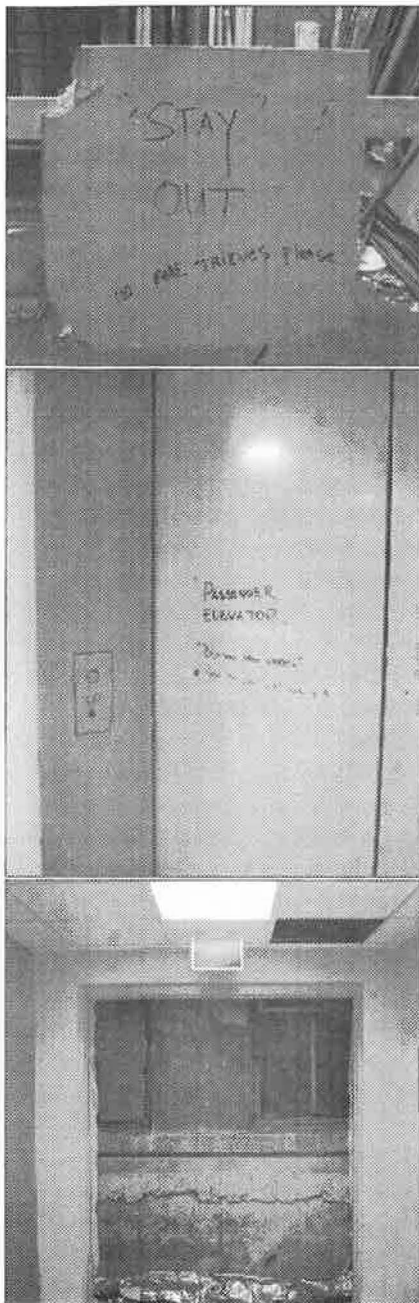
just try to move quickly and remind ourselves that nobody ever looks up.

Coming off the scaffolding onto the less illuminated gravel surface of the wing's uppermost roof, I stared lustily at the immense tower. Gilligan and I strolled through the open door into the unlit circular mechanical room at the tower's base — after a brief examination, we headed up the spiral staircase in the middle of the room. Scaffolding had been erected throughout the high-ceilinged tower, so we climbed up to the top to take some pictures. After looking around a little further, we made our way back out and down, our success making us much less nervous about being seen on the way out. I had finally seen the last secret bit of Charlie!

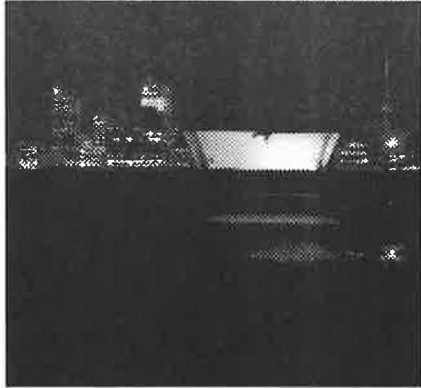
### The Clinical Services Building

While poor Charlie was tumbling down, an extensive new wing was going up on the site of the old Bell Wing, and before long the concrete framework for the massive new 12-storey Clinical Services Building was in place. The connections between the older wings and the CSB were well barricaded, with threats of alarms and closed-circuit surveillance, but it didn't me take long to find a reliable route to the new wing through the underground service corridors, and I soon began furtively making regular inspections of the construction workers' progress.

These inspections were a tense business. Workers stayed on duty well into the evenings, and I frequently had to hide in tunnels or darkened mechanical rooms for extended periods while waiting for people to



*Inside the new CSB, a polite request from employees, a falsely advertising elevator and a future set of emergency exit doors you may wish to avoid.*



*Within the CSB, the barricaded stairwell is meant to prevent access to the construction offices and the rooftops adjacent to the helipad.*

pass by. One day I was making my way up a clearly off-limits stairwell to check out some of the higher floors when I heard a group of workers coming down the steps towards me. I turned around and started heading down quickly, but at that moment a young guy without a hard hat came around the corner carrying a cardboard tray full of coffee cups. What a clever prop, I thought, stooping to pick up a plastic bag full of used Subway sandwich wrappers that someone had left lying on the floor in the stairwell. Armed with what looked like a bag of sandwiches and a piece of paper giving me directions, I headed back up the stairs and past the group of construction workers, none of whom gave me a second glance. After a tense hour or two poking about in various mostly unoccupied floors, hiding whenever construction workers came by, I managed to make my way back out unseen.

Returning to the basement service corridors on my way out, I saw that a door at the side of the corridor was propped opened slightly, and pushed it further ajar to see what was back there. I was greeted by two workers crouching a little as they made some repairs inside a tall, clean steam tunnel on the other side of the door. Far from being angry at my intrusion, one of the two guys was absolutely delighted to have someone else to talk to while his partner did all the work, and was endlessly fascinated by my digital camera. He even gave me his blessing to join them inside the tunnels for a while and take some pictures — though of course he didn't let me go out of sight. I was delighted to

find there were more steam tunnels to be discovered.

## **SARS Ruins Everything**

Right in the midst of all these good times, however, Toronto had the rotten luck to become the only city in the Western hemisphere to experience an outbreak of the dreaded Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

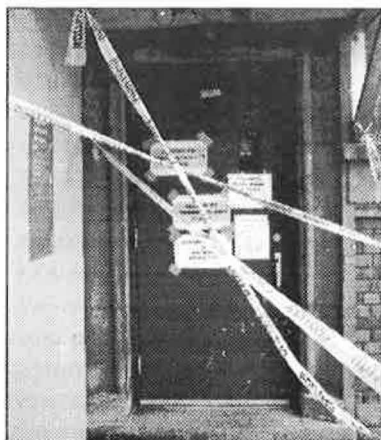
People in hospitals started dying, and Toronto General locked its doors to everyone but patients and staff, hastily erecting many new barricades and signs warning people not to come near the building. The quarantined hospital wasn't so firmly sealed as to keep out anyone really determined to get in, naturally, but I'm such a fan of breathing that the threat of SARS was enough to keep me away.



*I talked some workers into letting me join them in the newish steam tunnels connecting the various hospitals.*

The plague continued, with ups and downs, for an almost unbearably long five months. For me, they were five months of cruel torture as the construction on the Clinical Services Building continued to go ahead day after day while I looked on helplessly from the ground outside or from nearby skyscrapers. Obviously, it was totally unfair

for them to keep building it after they'd called a time out, but I didn't know who to complain to. My torment continued until finally one day in late 2003 city officials and the World Health Organization agreed that Toronto was once again safe from SARS and the hospitals — gradually, grudgingly — began to reopen. Security was tighter than it had been in the past. All the main entrances were placed under



*SARS made the hospital considerably less welcoming to visitors.*



*Finding a route into the Norman Urquhart Wing wasn't difficult; once there, we found that it was being thoroughly gutted.*

continual supervision, and sneaking in and keeping tabs on the new construction became difficult.

There were still some weak points in the hospital's armour, however, and I was soon able to resume my regular inspections of the CSB. There were no elevators that went directly from the bottom of the new wing to the top, but I gradually figured out the best combinations of passenger elevators, service elevators and stairs for getting around the new wing. On one occasion I rode to the top of the new wing with two roof-bound construction workers in full safety harnesses. They seemed prepared to ignore me as we rode up in the wood-walled service elevator together, but when they saw me climb out onto a nearby rooftop and start taking pictures they said they weren't sure if I was supposed to be there. I admitted that I probably wasn't and left.

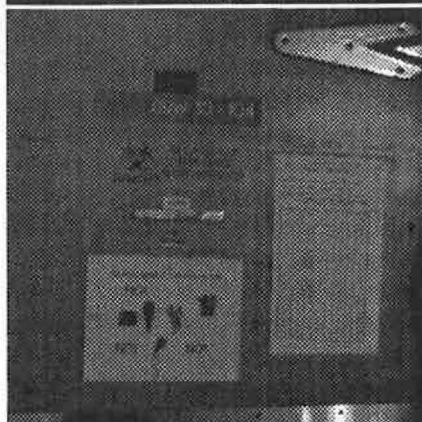
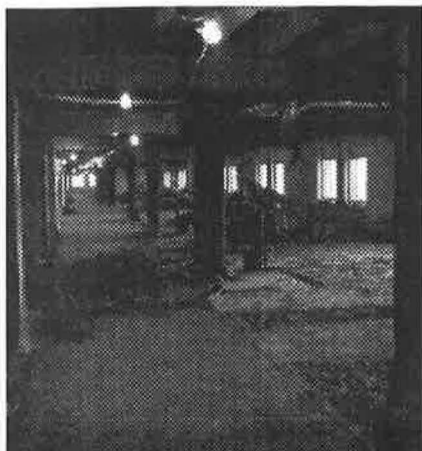
Returning a few nights later, I found the upper floors of the new wing surprisingly empty of employees of any sort. After visiting the eighth floor mechanical level, where I endured some ducts that filled the whole area with banshee-like screaming as I perused the gigantic machinery and blueprints for future additions, I climbed to the top of a service stairwell, where a ladder led me up to an unlocked roof hatch. There was a lot of noise out on the dark roof, and I soon realized why: a helicopter on the roof of the neighbouring Hospital for Sick Children was preparing for take-off. I kept away from it and stayed low on the roof, eventually finding my way back inside the hospital through another entrance.



## Knocking Down Norman

Although both the destruction of the old wing and the construction of the new were still underway, the hospital had caught a bad case of renovation fever, and at around this time suddenly made the bold move of shutting down almost the entirety of its largest wing, the Norman Urquhart Wing, along with substantial portions of the Eaton Wing. The entrances to the elevators were boarded up and the elevators themselves taken out of service and retired. Old walkways leading to the wing were bricked up and "No Trespassing" signs went up on all remaining entrances to the wing. Small bulldozers, raised into the building by crane, began to shove the hospital's heritage out the window into a dumpster below.

I recruited Victor to come with me to visit poor Norm. Sneaking into an unlit stairwell, we looked at the bleak, gutted state of some of the middle levels before making our way up to the less destroyed areas near the top of the wing. Climbing up a ladder and popping a roof hatch, we emptied out onto the 16th-storey gravel roof, where I scouted around while Victor, who is afraid of heights, urged me not to go too close to the edges. Climbing back down, we toured through an old abandoned laboratory and the darkened hallways of the former infectious disease unit and were just making our way into a disease fridge when we heard the command "Shhh!" very close behind us. We widened our eyes at each other. I pointed towards a nearby stairway and we silently raced away.



*Even though the NUW is totally cleared out, they still have a hangup about people bringing ice cream cones into the fridge where they store the HIV.*

When we were safe, we whispered about what had just happened. We were both worried that we were being tracked by security, but it seemed unlikely to me that security guards would shush each other while so near two trespassers. I wondered if the shushers might perhaps have been another pair of explorers. After planning a few



*There aren't actually cars in the service corridors under the hospital — just occasional buggies.*

possible escape routes, Victor and I began to nervously retrace our steps to find out. As we made our way back up the darkened stairwell, we noticed that some lights that had been on previously had now been turned off, making it clear that we weren't up here alone. Just then we heard the loud, clear sound of a door opening in the darkness right below us. "Run!" I urged, and we ran, very quickly retracing our steps through the old laboratory, the empty hallways and down the darkened stairwell. As we raced down the stairs we heard a loud siren roar to life. We thought for a moment that we were in real trouble, but we were greatly relieved when we realized the siren was coming from outside the building. We also realized that no one was right behind us, though it wasn't until we were on our way out of the wing that we felt safe enough to calm down and catch our breath.

## **Floodtunnel**

Criss-crossing the underbelly of the entire hospital, alternately one or two levels below ground, the service corridors are one of the hospital's more interesting features. They're mostly empty, slightly primitive places, with dripping pipes and puddles here and there, and are clearly for employees only, although a confident walk is

usually a good substitute for an ID badge. They provide a good route to the receiving docks, a wide variety of storage rooms and mechanical rooms, and, through an underground connection built in 1978, to the other hospitals in the area. The corridors link directly to the basements of Mt. Sinai and Sick Kids, and through Mt. Sinai to Princess Margaret Hospital and the former Queen Elizabeth Hospital. You can get anywhere in any of these buildings without ever going outside. Those other hospitals are all worth exploring, but TGH is most definitely the jewel in the crown.

While wandering around the service corridors by myself one evening and trying random doors, I came across what appeared to be a fairly long ventilation tunnel that stretched off further than I could see. Closing the door behind me and drawing out my flashlight, I made my way down the tunnel, noticing its downward slope,

and followed it around a corner into a deeper darkness. The floor was covered in wet mud, but a few boards and wooden skids allowed me cross it without getting too filthy. I made my way along this darker branch until I came to a metal stepladder leading up. Ventilation ducts mostly blocked the way, but I was able to squeeze under them and out into a dimly lit mechanical room.

Here I was surprised to find a large, unlit concrete tunnel shooting off to the north. The dusty air quickly grew moist, and the water level on the floor was just dry enough that my socks didn't get soaked. Before long the tunnel assumed the traditional form of a steam tunnel, except that the pipes obviously weren't carrying anything anymore. All the metal in the tunnel was so severely rusted that it seemed like the entire tunnel had spent a decade or two under water. The electrical outlets along the wall were not only corroded, but looked like primitive relics from the earliest days of electricity. After a long while of wading up the dark tunnel, I passed a badly rusted gate and then found my way blocked where an extremely rusty ladder led down into a flooded section of the tunnel. End of the line, for now.

A week or two later I returned, this time equipped with Victor and some rubber boots, eager to figure out the purpose of this extremely mysterious tunnel. Large as it was, it seemed so well hidden and neglected that I couldn't imagine more than two or three hospital employees even knew of its existence. Retracing the route I'd used earlier, Victor and I carefully lowered ourselves down the rusty ladder



*The long, wet and winding flooded tunnel stretches its way up and down and through the heart of the hospital.*

and splashed into the clear water below. Moving slowly, so as not to overtop our boots, we waded along the twists and turns of the flooded tunnel until we eventually came to another ladder leading back up to dry land. We followed this gradually curving tunnel for a long way, occasionally climbing up and down rusty ladders or just climbing up and down the tunnel itself when the ladders were too deteriorated to be of any use. Unfortunately, after a long stroll, the trip ended in a sudden anticlimax when we came to a small, impassable steel door at the end of the tunnel. There was nothing for us to do but walk and climb and wade and crawl back out.

I headed back with Liz not long after to show her the tunnel and take some pictures. We were deep in conversation on our way to the entrance, and as we approached it I didn't even think twice about opening the door and heading in, even though a guy had been walking down the service corridor toward us. I figured he was just a guy. I closed the door behind us and waited to hear how impressed Liz was with the tunnel.

"I can't believe you opened the door in front of that guy!" Liz said.

"Yeah, that was dumb," I conceded. "I wasn't thinking."

"You can't open secret doors right in front of people," Liz replied, and just then the door opened behind her, and the guy who'd been walking by in the corridor asked if he could help us.

"We're okay," Liz offered. "We're just looking in here."

"Can I ask why? I'm wondering because of hospital security."

"We just wanted to take a picture of this tunnel. Can we just take one picture? Or would you rather we leave?" Liz asked.

"Yeah, you'd better come out," the guy suggested, so we joined him in the hallway. "So what's this about? Are you guys part of that 'infiltration'?"

"Hmm?"

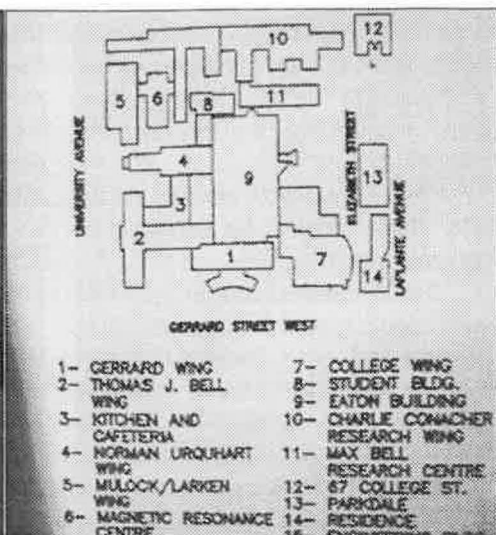
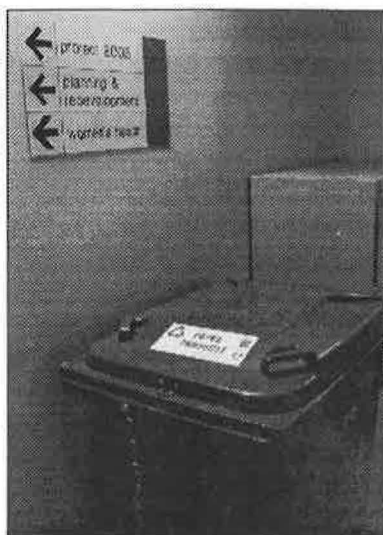
"These people look in tunnels and stuff in buildings, and then write about how easy it was to get in," he explained. "It's pretty interesting. Anyway we have to be careful."

"Well, we just photograph interesting places as a hobby... we've been doing it for years," Liz explained. "But if you'd like us to leave we can. Should we just go?"

"Yeah... I think you probably should. Thanks for being cooperative. You know the way out?"

We assured him we did, and wished him a good day as we left.

As we analyzed the encounter over a hot chocolate upstairs, I apologized for my recklessness in assuming the guy was just another uninterested drone. Liz mentioned how badly she'd begun blushing when the guy mentioned *Infiltration*. We wondered how obvious it was to him that we were us. Whether he knew or not, we felt very grateful to him for having just asked us to leave. If it had come down to a search of our stuff (which included flashlights, cameras and some copies of the zine), things might have gone much less smoothly. Liz summed up the moral of the encounter thusly: "Maybe it's better to assume that no one is just a guy, because even if someone is just a guy, they can tell someone who's not just a guy."



*The Project 2003 offices provided a bounty of useful blueprints, maps, models and memos. (Note that the College Wing is horribly mislabelled on this map.)*

## Mulock-Larkin Wing

In the course of my travels through the various construction and demolition projects going on all around the hospital, I repeatedly stumbled upon memos and blueprints referring to "Project 2003", which is apparently the hospital's poorly chosen nickname for its megamakeover — a process that began in 1996 and will be completed in 2006 at the earliest. When I learned that Project 2003 was headquartered on the upper floors of the Mulock-Larkin Wing, one of the most elderly remaining branches of the hospital, I became even more interested in getting to know that wing.

The MLW, as it is usually called, is an odd amalgam of three 1913 buildings: the Shields Emergency Hospital, the Peter Larkin Outpatient Annex and the Cawthra Mulock Outpatient Annex. The MLW is the hospital's smallest wing, but that doesn't stop it from being one of the most confusing. I'm

fairly certain that if I were to invite 10 friends to join me for dinner on the third floor of the wing, nine of them would get hopelessly lost and starve to death on their way there. I'd been lost inside the wing's odd lower levels several times myself, but I'd never accidentally stumbled upon Project 2003.

Indeed, the doors to the areas above the ground floor were always locked, until finally one evening Victor and I happened upon a door that had been helpfully propped open. Venturing into one of the hospital's last remaining *terras incognita*, we made our way down the hall towards the Project 2003 headquarters. I was delighted when we stumbled upon several tables and bins full of maps and scale models of the hospital in its old and new forms. As Victor and I photographed and examined these, perhaps expressing our enthusiasm a little too noisily, we were caught off-guard when an angry-looking fellow



stuck his head out of his nearby office and asked what we were doing.

"I was just showing my friend the scale models of the hospital," I explained.

"These are private offices, and it's after closing hours," he said angrily. "Do you work here?"

"No," I admitted, suspecting that I was dealing with someone who would enjoy calling my bluff.

"So you just wandered in off the street?"

"I wouldn't put it that way, but.... Do you want us to leave?"

"Well, you can wait a few minutes," he said, returning to his office.

Based on how much of a jerk this guy seemed to be, it felt safe to conclude that he was calling security. I continued talking to Victor about the model for another minute, so as not to seem too guilty, and then called out a polite-sounding apology to the fellow as we left the area and headed elsewhere.

From visiting the Project 2003 headquarters, I learned that the demolition of the MLW itself, to make way for phase II of MaRS, is expected to commence in summer 2004. But fear not! Although the historic rooms and halls where patients have healed or sickened for generations will be discarded to make way for generic office space, arrangements have already been made to preserve *both* a stained glass window and several 'terra cotta niches' and to find a place for these decorative Chunkzo'-Heritage™ somewhere in the soulless new building. And you thought these bastards didn't care about anything but profits!

## Voyages to MaRS

I like megaprojects, I really do. But the people behind MaRS are obviously evil, and I'm not just saying that because they killed my friend Charlie. MaRS, which bills itself as a "medical-commercial convergence centre" (*shiver!!*), is a heartless, soulless enterprise posing as a scientific charity. It has taken away land reserved for hospital use and handed it over to private corporations, and bilked governments out of \$40 million of taxpayer money that could have been spent on healthcare. MaRS justifies this by saying its project will lead to "the creation of employment opportunities and new wealth for Canadians," but doesn't specify that the Canadians in question are those who happen to own pharmaceutical corporations or biotech firms. With MaRS, all research will be for profit; advances that won't result in new patents for drugs or medical devices simply will not occur. All of this makes the place seem sinister to me.

That said, of course, construction is construction, and though it pained me to see the old buildings come down I was keen to watch the new ones shoot up, preferably from up close.

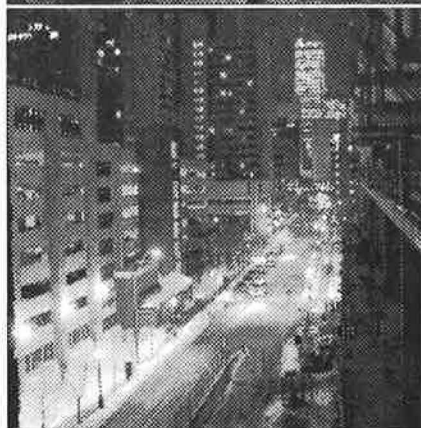
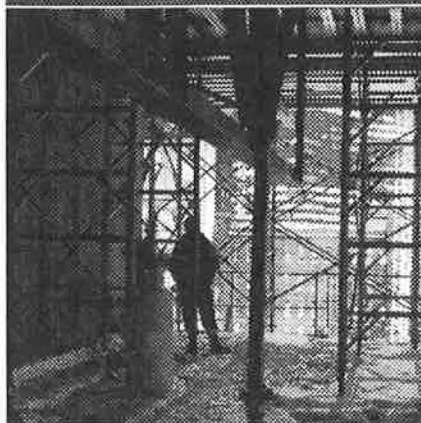
Shortly after the final gutting and demolition of several of Charlie's wards, new construction work began to the east and south of the old wing. (Incidentally, the new site plan patronizingly refers to the façades preserved from the College Wing and the Charlie Conacher Research Wing as "the Heritage Building". Once the project is up and running, the place won't have any actual name at all....

It'll just be, you know, that part with the bricks. Some heritage!)

The building south of Charlie, known as MaRS B, was to occupy what had once been the courtyard in the midst of all the other wings, thereby blocking off their view. Former windows surrounding the courtyard were hastily removed and replaced with cinder blocks, and before long the dirty pits I'd crept through were filled with cement and steel, and the deep drilling machines were replaced with soaring cranes lifting the bits of the new complex into place.

Meanwhile, the east tower, also known as MaRS C, began to go up quickly, at a rate of a new storey every week or two. Worried that they'd finish it before I even had a chance to take a look, I invited Avatar and Victor to join me on a trip inside one winter evening. Victor didn't show up, so Av and I waded through the snow and began scouting around the site looking for a good route in. We were just poking under the fence inside the darkened courtyard when suddenly Av nervously pointed out that a man in a black jacket inside the hospital was coming down some stairs and heading toward us. The man in the black jacket opened the door and headed straight for us. I introduced him to Av, and Victor apologized for showing up late.

Properly introduced, the three of us navigated our way into MaRS' east tower. We headed down the unfinished stairs as far as we could go, several storeys underground, and explored the future parking garages. Returning to the surface, we took some scaffold stairs up to



*In MaRS' east tower, we started in the parking garages and made our way up to the top, where we stared out at the hospital construction all around us.*

the higher levels of the building. The cement roof of the fourth floor was so recently completed that large piles of snow still sat indoors. From the tallest levels, we had a good view of the hospital's courtyard and the city around us. Unfortunately, the building was too unfinished to hold our attention for very long.

When Av and I returned to check on the progress of MaRS a few weeks later, we found that the east tower had almost reached its full height of 16 storeys, making it the tallest building in the hospital complex. Venturing in at ground level, we tried to avoid construction workers and the security guard patrolling the perimeter as we searched at length for the stairs up, but couldn't find them anywhere. Eventually we decided the stairs must be behind a locked door, and resorted to climbing up a nearby crane to get to the second floor. From there we found a well-hidden staircase and climbed up 14 storeys to the highest roof of the tower, where we were rewarded with a really spectacular view of the city and the hospital through the drizzling rain. While Av experimented with time-lapse photography, we sat on the uppermost roof and watched a rainbow form over the city as the

sun set. I could feel that I was starting to get attached to this brand new building in spite of myself, and thought about how maybe I'd reluctantly come to like MaRS over the next few decades. But I also reminded myself not to get too close — after all, it'll probably come down before I do.

As Av and I headed out through the non-demolished but thoroughly stripped bare remnants of Charlie, we noticed that the door down to the steam tunnels was open, and I told Av to brace himself for the most pipe-filled tunnels he'd ever seen. To my astonishment, however, the tunnels were all but empty. All the old pipes and insulation had been removed, and the routes to the other buildings had been sealed. The incredible tunnel network was no more.

It's been incredibly difficult to condense more than a hundred trips over the course of three years into a scant 32 pages. The hospital became a second home to me, one where I experienced some of the most intense moments of happiness, sadness, fear and exhilaration of my life. A single issue simply isn't long enough to do justice to the many wonders of this place that has meant so much to me.



X TO BE D